



January 24, 2024

Subject: Public Testimony on the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs Committee SB 24-004 Meeting January 25, 2024

To Whom It May Concern:

My name is Richard Nagley, a US Air Force Vietnam Veteran and founder of the Veterans Coalition of the San Luis Valley, a 501©3 Veterans Service Organization (VSO) serving veterans in the State of Colorado and Nationwide.

In 2002, the Colorado Division of Veterans Affairs (CDVA) was transferred to the Colorado Department of Military and Veterans Affairs for a number of complex reasons. Not the least of which was the assumption that “Like things should go together.” Today we have learned all things that may look alike should not be treated the same way. Such is the situation of dealing with Veterans vs those that are still in Active Military Service.

CDVA and the Colorado Board of Veterans Affairs (CBVA) are defined in CRS Title 28 Parts 7 & 8. As a Veteran Service Officer (VSO), trained and accredited by a National Veteran Service Organization, I work with Veterans “Boots on the Ground and in the Trenches” on a 24/7 basis. There are a number of issues Veteran Service Organizations and Veteran Service Officers have with CRS Title 28, but “Weakening CRS and eliminating the role of supervision and subsequently ACCOUNTABILITY is not one of them.” Those that have taken on the MISSION to serve Veterans, either for pay or as a volunteer, are not recognized for how hard the role of a VSO has become. The skills to be a Veteran Service Officer (VSO) are unique and very different from those required to operate a Veteran Service Organization (VSO). Yes, VSO has 2 different meanings.

CDVA and County Veteran Service Officers (CVSOs) should and can be more effective serving Veterans. Too many veterans are and have become

homeless, victims of suicide, addicted to drugs and alcohol, and the list goes on. I personally have worked with the National Veterans Administration (VA) and CDVA & CVSOs for 15 years. I have seen what it can do *to* and has done *for* Veterans. CRS Title 28 Parts 7 & 8 should be revised, but not this way.

My specific comments addressing SB 24-004, CRS Title 28 and CDVA/CBVA are as follows:

- 1) The State Auditor conducted a **Performance Audit September 2022 2170P** (https://leg.colorado.gov/sites/default/files/documents/audits/2170p_veterans_services_performance_audit.pdf). The **Key Concern "The Division of Veterans Affairs (Division) and the Colorado Board of Veterans Affairs (Board) do not sufficiently plan for, supervise, and support veterans services, which are largely provided by county veterans service officers (VSOs)"** which has not been met in practice.
- 2) The Bill's Summary Legislative Audit Committee comment speaks to the Audit Finding "**DVA has a duty to supervise CVSOs.**" The statement by the Executive Director of CDVA at the JBC SMART Government Act Presentation Monday, 1/22/24, that the reason for changing SUPERVISE to MONITOR "...was to bring CRS in line with what was actually happening." What about "***What Should Be Happening?***" Veterans Pay Up Front. The US Veterans Administration System is hard enough to understand and work with. CDVA/CBVA/State Veteran Service Officers (SVSOs)/CVSOs should be there to support, advocate, and council Veterans, especially those in need.
- 3) Most veterans requesting services from CDVA and CVSOs did not **RETIRE** from Active Military Duty, for a wide variety of reasons. Many of these veterans want nothing to do with the Military Chain-of-Command structure any longer. Most SVSOs and CVSOs can **NOT RELATE** to these veterans in Civilian Terms. This causes significant problems for the veterans.
- 4) Tax payer dollars fund CDVA. Veterans and those related to a veteran make up 99% of Colorado's population. A portion of Colorado's veteran population brought over \$4.8B into the state from the US VA in FY '22 according to the VA's Summary of Expenditures data. What if more veteran filed claims, and were receiving the Benefits they have earned?
- 5) The Colorado Division of Veterans Affairs has 2 Grant Programs to assist veterans. The primary program, Veterans Assistant Grant

(VAG) is open to nonprofit organizations with a 501©-status other than 19 or 23 and governmental entities. The VAG Grant deals with VSOs (organizations and officers) that deal with veterans “*in the trenches*” and is missing from the DMVA JBC report. Why? The second Grant the Veterans Trust Fund (VTF) deals primarily with Capital Expenditures and a different group of Veteran Service Organizations and veterans.

- 6) CDVA has created an organization 30+ strong, many without practical experience, and CDVA does NOT operate as a business and does NOT Serve Veterans. This is a mistake. Congress MUST do its Due Diligence and Oversight to ensure Veteran Homelessness, Suicide Prevention, and Earned Benefits are available and accessible to all veterans uniformly and in accordance with President Lincoln’s Promise.

Veteran Service Officers can’t save the world, but they can save veterans one at a time if they only do their job. The American Legion has a saying ***BPOTS: Be Part of the Solution***. If you don’t want to ***BPOTS*** get out of the way and find someone who does.

If you wish to discuss this further, we can schedule a meeting.

Respectfully Submitted,

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